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Letter dated 9 January 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

The purpose of the present letter is to state clearly why the Security Council must lift the arms embargo it imposed on Ethiopia and Eritrea under resolution 1298 (2000). Ethiopia's opposition to the embargo was made known from the start when the issue was being debated last year. We said at the time: "As a matter of principle, the people of Ethiopia condemn ... this unjust and unfair resolution adopted by the Security Council."

The armed conflict began in May 1998 when Eritrean forces crossed the border and occupied areas under Ethiopian administration. My country appealed to the international community to take action in redressing the aggression. We sent high-level delegations to several countries, many of whom are represented on the Security Council. The aim was to ask them to help us avert a war between the two countries. Some heeded this appeal and did what they could. Others ignored it as simply "another conflict in Africa".

One lesson that the Brahimi report (A/55/305-S/2000/809) drew from the inaction or indecisiveness of the international community was to call a spade a spade. In conflict situations between States and within States, and which pose threats to regional or international security, one must be prepared to put blame where it is due.

Prevarications, especially by the body charged with the "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security", would only encourage those with little respect for international norms of behaviour to continually flout it. Ethiopia has throughout its long history never crossed into another country with the purpose of annexing the territory of others. On the contrary, it was a subject of invasion by countries near and far, small and big. In a historically well-known case, the old league of nations imposed the infamous arms embargo on both Mussolini's Italy and Ethiopia, when the latter was invaded by the former. Turning justice, fairness and logic on its head, an arms embargo was clamped on the aggressor and on the victim of aggression. It was clear whom that action was going to hurt. Mussolini's Italy, which was self-sufficient in armaments, also controlled Eritrea and Somalia — on Ethiopia's northern and south-eastern borders. Ethiopia, with little arms manufacturing capability and landlocked, as today, had its hands totally tied.

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The more recent action by the Security Council, while not at the level of that of the League of Nations, is nevertheless the same in principle. It is unjust to deny a country its efforts in defending itself. It flouts the Organization's own Charter to deny a member State the inherent right to defend itself. This is particularly so when the Council shirks its responsibility of taking measures necessary to maintain peace and security. Hence, Ethiopia believes, as it did earlier, that the arms embargo should never have been imposed on it. That action, in all fairness, should have been directed at the aggressor. This was not done. The decent thing to do now is to remove it. Besides, the two countries in their agreement of 12 December 2000 in Algiers (A/55/686-S/2000/1183, annex) have gone beyond what was asked of them under paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of resolution 1298 (2000). The goalposts should not be altered now.

We believe that Security Council members can and should shoulder their responsibilities by giving a boost to confidence in the region as a whole. The lifting of the sanction will be an important symbolic gesture of telling those with good will for the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea, that hope is being restored. Speaking for my country, we have already turned all our efforts to the priority of fighting our main enemy: poverty and backwardness. To date, we have demobilized many thousands of troops and the process is continuing. The military budget has also been drastically reduced. Hence, those who oppose lifting the arms ban must have other motives. It certainly would not be for the sole purpose of stopping an arms buying spree. There are no such intentions on Ethiopia's part. The facts on the ground confirm this. If they believe that they are worried by the other party to the conflict, let them say so and take the appropriate measure. As a question of principle and also based on the fulfilment of the original purpose of the resolution, the arms embargo must be lifted before it lapses.

Under the Algiers agreement of 12 December 2000, demining operations have to be carried out. This is expected to help in bringing back normalcy to the rural communities affected and displaced by the conflict. However, under the current embargo, no country is allowed to offer help to the two countries in removing the tens of thousands of mines in the border regions. I do not believe the Security Council would like to go down in history as having not only prolonged the suffering of the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples but also contributed to deaths from hidden mines which could have been removed. It is ironic that the maintenance of the ban will also mean exposing to danger the peacekeeping forces under the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The Security Council must not squander an opportunity for enhancing its credibility. It is time to lift the embargo and save lives.

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Dr. Abdulmejid **Hussein**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative